

Back injuries occur in all kinds of jobs, so it is important for everyone to understand how to lift safely.

Back Injuries Are Painful

Back injuries are a leading cause of lost time from work. They can cause pain and inconvenience – and perhaps a lifetime of suffering.

Lifting incorrectly is a major contributor to back injuries. These injuries are not confined to workers who do heavy lifting all day long. Back injuries occur in all kinds of jobs, so it is important for everyone to understand how to lift safely.

To lift safely, first plan your lift. Take a good look at the load, determining size, weight, shape and how it is positioned. Could the load be too heavy, too big or too awkward for you to move by yourself?

Plan your route. Look for any potential problems such as a slippery or uneven floor surface or obstacles along the way. Don't forget to have a look at the spot where you will set down the load to determine any difficulties.

This is how to pick up a load:

- Get as close as possible to the load.
- Position your feet approximately shoulder-width apart. If necessary, straddle the load.
- Tuck in your backside, and bend your knees.
- Never bend from the waist or stretch out your upper body.
- Squat down, and lift the load by using the strength of your leg muscles, rather than your back.

- Never twist your body when carrying a load. If it is necessary to turn, move your feet, rather than your body.

- Before you start to move with the load, be sure you can see over it.

- When setting down the load, make sure you do not put strain on your back by bending over. Squat down again if necessary. (Also be careful you don't crush your hands as you move past obstacles such as doorjamb or as you set down the load.)

There's no point in getting a back injury by trying to be a hero with a heavy load. Get help if you need it. Two or more people can do a team lift. Mechanical aids such as a hand truck or pallet jack can also be called into service.

Some lifts require special techniques:

- If you must lift a load higher than your shoulders, use a stepstool, stepladder or similar safe device.
- It can also be tough to pick up a load from deep inside a bin. In this case, get close to the load and press your bent knees against the bin.
- For light objects in a bin, flex one knee and swing the other leg out behind you. Use one hand on the edge of the bin for balance, and use the other hand to pick up the item.

Lifting correctly and safely is well worth the effort. It can save you a painful and crippling back injury.

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